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**The Exploitation of Children as Soldiers in the Philippines:
An Analysis of Issues and Challenges in
Social Work Practice**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**Master
in
Social Work**

**At Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand**

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2006

*Your children are not your children
They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself
They came through you but not from you
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts
For they have their own thoughts
You may house their bodies but not their souls
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you,
For life goes out backward nor carries with yesterday
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

- Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore and analyze how social workers directly working with child soldiers perceive the child soldier phenomenon in the Philippines. Specifically, it aims to come up with a picture of the child soldier phenomenon in the country, analyze the various factors or conditions contributory to the participation of children in armed conflict, explore the issues and challenges the child soldier phenomenon poses in social work practice and draw lessons or insights that can contribute to the improvement of current social work practice. This qualitative study used personal interview and instrumental case study methods in data gathering. Selected regional social workers of the government's welfare department, who have handled cases of children involved in armed conflict, served as the main source of information. They were selected through purposive sampling. Likewise, instrumental case study method was used to strengthen and enrich the data gathered using 31 selected case files of child soldiers. The information was analyzed using an ecological and structural framework.

This research has shown that the child soldier phenomenon in the country is multidimensional and connected with various factors internal and external to the child. The existence of the phenomenon could not be attributed solely to a single factor but rather to combination of factors in the child's environment, which serve as a cumulative force that pushes the child to participate in the armed group. This study put forth the need for a multifaceted approach in social work practice with child soldier where all systems - micro, meso, exo, macro - in the child's immediate and distant environment are considered in the entire helping process. Likewise, it stressed the need for social work actions that provides not only immediate relief to individual child and her/his family, but also longer-term solutions that targets oppressive and unjust institutional and structural order in the society. It affirmed the importance of transformative social work practice where interventions go beyond mere palliative care and the importance of reflective practice where reflection-in-action is integral to the performance of social work profession.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank the fifteen social workers who responded to my invitation to participate in this study. My interaction with them have been very fruitful not only because they have helped me gather the information I needed but also because they have inspired me with their valuable insights drawn from years of actual experiences with the less fortunate. These social workers have courageously faced the challenge of working with different sectors in the society despite the constraints brought about by limited human and material resources, complex rules and procedures in work setting and high demand for quality and professional service.

I am extremely grateful, too, to the Department of Social Welfare and Development for allowing me to conduct the interview to its selected personnel specifically the regional social workers in the field and residential centers besides giving me the access to its resources and reports, data or files concerning children in armed conflict situation. My sincere thanks goes to the management and staff of the central and regional offices that facilitated my contacts and interviews with the respondents.

A number of offices, organizations and institutions provided me with relevant information regarding my topic such as the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP) for the initiatives, actions and plans regarding government efforts to protect and promote the welfare of children, to them, I give my sincerest appreciation. I am grateful, too, to UP-CIDS- PST, PCUCS, UNICEF for sharing with me or leading me to the source of all relevant reference materials on child soldiers.

Grateful acknowledgement also goes to my course supervisor, Dr. Mike O'Brien who exerted extra effort in guiding me to finish this undertaking and in making distant supervising work for my best interest. Dr. Mike also afforded

me with the social support/ connection I needed being an international student in New Zealand. Special thanks, too, to Prof. Marilyn Waring for putting extra time clarifying my concepts during the initial stage of preparing my research proposal, to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for the ethical approval and to the administrative staff of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences for facilitating my request for book interloan and graduate research fund.

I would like to thank NEDA and NZAID for granting me the benefits that goes with the scholarship grant and the ISO officers for the extra effort looking into my needs and understanding my shortcomings.

Lastly, to my *inay* Rosie, husband Ronald, sons Ivan and Ronelle and my relatives and friends, who in one way or the other have lend a hand to make this study possible, thank you for supporting me and believing in me.

To God be the Glory!

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AO	Administrative Order
ASG	Abu Sayaff Group
CAFGU	Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit
CHR	Commission on Human Rights
CIAC	Children Involved in Armed Conflict
CNSP	Children in Need of Special Protection
CPI	Consumption Expenditure Pattern
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSUCS	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
CWC	Council for the Welfare of Children
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DND	Department of National Defense
DO	Department Order
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EO	Executive Order
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
IAC-CIAC	Inter-Agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict
ILO-IPEC	International Labour Organization -International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KARAPATAN	Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights
LGU	Local Government Unit
LIW	Low Intensity Warfare
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defense Systems
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MSSD	Ministry of Social Services and Development

NGO	Non-Government Organizations
NPA	New Peoples' Army
NPUDC	National Program for the Unification and Development Council
NSCB	National Statistical Coordination Board
NSO	National Statistics Office
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process
PACSA	President's Action Committee on Social Amelioration
PCSUCS	Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child soldiers
PD	Presidential Decree
PNP	Philippine National Police
RA	Republic Act
RRCY	Reception and Rehabilitation Center for Youth
RSCC	Reception and Study Center for Children
SWC	Social Welfare Commission
UN	United Nations
UNCROC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP-CIDS	University of the Philippines - Center For Integrative and Development Studies
USA	United States of America
VAT	Value Added Tax

Glossary of Filipino Terms

barkada	peer group
bayanihan, damayan	social practices of helping others
barangays	Filipino settlement, a community
Hukbalahap	people's anti-Japanese army
mag-anak	family
pakikibaka	struggle
utang na loob	debt of gratitude